

of his companions had nicknamed Cavaignac on account of his little pointed beard—a rarity among Indians, most of whom have no hair on their faces. One day, when I was playing with a group of children, a little girl was struck by one of her comrades. She ran to me for protection and began to whisper something, a “great secret,” in my ear. As I did not understand I had to ask her to repeat it over and over again. Eventually her adversary found out what was going on, came up to me in a rage, and tried in her turn to tell me what seemed to be another secret. After a little while I was able to get to the bottom of the incident. The first little girl was trying to tell me her enemy’s name, and when the enemy found out what was going on she decided to tell me the other girl’s name, by way of reprisal. Thenceforward it was easy enough, though not very scrupulous, to egg the children on, one against the other, till in time I knew all of their names. When this was completed and we were all, in a sense, one another’s accomplices, I soon got them to give me the adults’ names too. When this [cabal] was discovered the children were reprimanded and my sources of information dried up.<sup>7</sup>

We cannot enter here into the difficulties of an empirical deduction of this prohibition, but we know a priori that the “proper names” whose interdiction and revelation Lévi-Strauss describes here are not proper names. The expression “proper name” is improper, for the very reasons that *The Savage Mind* will recall. What the interdict is laid upon is the uttering of what *functions* as the proper name. And this function is *consciousness* itself. The proper name in the colloquial sense, in the sense of consciousness, is (I should say “in truth” were it not necessary to be wary of that phrase)<sup>8</sup> only a designation of appurtenance and a linguistico-social classification. The lifting of the interdict, the great game of denunciation and the great exhibition of the “proper” (let us note that we speak here of an act of war and there is much to say about the fact that it is little girls who open themselves to this game and these hostilities) does not consist in revealing proper names, but in tearing the veil hiding a classification and an appurtenance, the inscription within a system of linguistico-social differences.

What the Nambikwara hid and the young girls lay bare through transgression, is no longer the absolute idioms, but already varieties of invested common names, “abstracts” if, as we read in *The Savage Mind* (p. 242) [p. 182], “systems of appellations also have their ‘abstracts.’”

The concept of the proper name, unproblematicized as Lévi-Strauss uses it in *Tristes Tropiques*, is therefore far from being simple and manageable. Consequently, the same may be said of the concepts of violence, ruse, perfidy, or oppression, that punctuate “A Writing Lesson” a little further on. We have already noted that violence here does not unexpectedly break in all at once, starting from an original innocence whose nakedness is *surprised* at the very moment that the secret of the *so-called* proper names

is violated. The structure of violence is complex and its possibility—writing—no less so.

There was in fact a first violence to be named. To name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute. To think the unique *within* the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of the arche-writing: arche-violence, loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence, in truth the loss of what has never taken place, of a self-presence which has never been given but only dreamed of and always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance. Out of this arche-violence, forbidden and therefore confirmed by a second violence that is reparatory, protective, instituting the “moral,” prescribing the concealment of writing and the effacement and obliteration of the so-called proper name which was already dividing the proper, a third violence can *possibly* emerge or not (an empirical possibility) within what is commonly called evil, war, indiscretion, rape; which consists of revealing by effraction the so-called proper name, the originary violence which has severed the proper from its property and its self-sameness [*proprété*]. We could name a third violence of reflection, which denudes the native non-identity, classification as denaturation of the proper, and identity as the abstract moment of the concept. It is on this tertiary level, that of the empirical consciousness, that the common concept of violence (the system of the moral law and of transgression) whose possibility remains yet unthought, should no doubt be situated. The scene of proper names is written on this level; as will be later the writing lesson.

This last violence is all the more complex in its structure because it refers at the same time to the two inferior levels of arche-violence and of law. In effect, it reveals the first nomination which was already an expropriation, but it denudes also that which since then functioned as the proper, the so-called proper, substitute of the deferred proper, *perceived* by the *social* and *moral consciousness* as the proper, the reassuring seal of self-identity, the secret.

Empirical violence, war in the colloquial sense (ruse and perfidy of little girls, *apparent* ruse and perfidy of little girls, for the anthropologist will prove them innocent by showing himself as the true and only culprit; ruse and perfidy of the Indian chief playing at the comedy of writing, *apparent* ruse and perfidy of the Indian chief borrowing all his resources from the Occidental intrusion), which Lévi-Strauss always thinks of as an *accident*. An accident occurring, in his view, upon a terrain of innocence, in a “state of culture” whose *natural* goodness had not yet been degraded.<sup>9</sup>

Two pointers, seemingly anecdotal and belonging to the decor of the representation to come, support this hypothesis that the “Writing Lesson” will

confirm. They announce the great staging of the "lesson" and show to advantage the art of the composition of this travelogue. In accordance with eighteenth-century tradition, the anecdote, the page of confessions, the fragment from a journal are knowledgeably put in place, calculated for the purposes of a philosophical demonstration of the relationships between nature and society, ideal society and real society, most often between the *other* society and our *society*.

What is the first pointer? The battle of proper names follows the arrival of the foreigner and that is not surprising. It is born in the presence and even from the presence of the anthropologist who comes to disturb order and natural peace, the complicity which peacefully binds the good society to itself in its play. Not only have the people of the Line imposed ridiculous sobriquets on the natives, obliging them to assume these intrinsically (hare, sugar, Cavaignac), but it is the anthropological eruption which breaks the secret of the proper names and the innocent complicity governing the play of young girls. It is the anthropologist who violates a virginal space so accurately connoted by the scene of a game and a game played by little girls. The mere presence of the foreigner, the mere fact of his having his eyes open, cannot not provoke a violation: the *aside*, the secret murmured in the ear, the successive movements of the "stratagem," the acceleration, the precipitation, a certain increasing jubilation in the movement before the falling back which follows the consummated fault, when the "sources" have "dried up," makes us think of a dance and a fête as much as of war.

The mere presence of a spectator, then, is a violation. First a pure violation: a silent and immobile foreigner attends a game of young girls. That one of them should have "struck" a "comrade" is not yet true violence. No integrity has been breached. Violence appears only at the moment when the intimacy of proper names can be opened to forced entry. And that is possible only at the moment when the space is shaped and reoriented by the glance of the foreigner. The eye of the other calls out the proper names, spells them out, and removes the prohibition that covered them.

At first the anthropologist is satisfied merely to see. A fixed glance and a mute presence. Then things get complicated, become more tortuous and labyrinthine, when he becomes a party to the play of the rupture of play, as he lends an ear and broaches a first complicity with the victim who is also the trickster. Finally, for what counts is the names of the adults (one could say the eponyms and the secret is violated only in the place where the names are attributed), the ultimate denunciation can no longer do without the active intervention of the foreigner. Who, moreover, claims to have intervened and accuses himself of it. He has seen, then heard; but, passive in the face of what he already knew he was provoking, he still waited to hear the master-names. The violation was not consummated, the naked base of the proper was still reserved. As one cannot or rather must not in-

You might read these *envois* as the preface to a book that I have not written.

It would have treated that which proceeds from the *postes*, *postes* of every genre, to psychoanalysis.

Less in order to attempt a psychoanalysis of the postal effect than to start from a singular event, Freudian psychoanalysis, and to refer to a history and a technology of the *courrier*, to some general theory of the *envoi* and of everything which by means of some telecommunication allegedly *destines* itself.

The three last parts of the present work, "To Speculate—on 'Freud,'" "Le facteur de la vérité," "Du tout" are all different by virtue of their length, their circumstance or pretext, their manner and their dates. But they preserve the memory of this project, occasionally even exhibit it.

As for the "Envois" themselves, I do not know if their reading is bearable.

You might consider them, if you really wish to, as the remainders of a recently destroyed correspondence. Destroyed by fire or by that which figuratively takes its place, more certain of leaving nothing out of the reach of what I like to call the tongue of fire, not even the cinders if cinders there are [*s'il y a là cendre*].

Save [*fors*] a chance.

A correspondence: this is still to say too much, or too little. Perhaps it was not one (but more or less) nor very correspondent. This still remains to be decided.

Today, the seventh of September nineteen seventy-nine, there are but *envois*, only *envois* from which whatever was spared or if you prefer "saved" (I already hear murmured "registered," as is said for a kind of receipt) will have been due, yes, due to a very strange principle of selection, and which for my part, even today, I consider

questionable, as, moreover, the grate, the filter, and the economy of sorting can be on every occasion, especially if they destine for preservation, not to say for the archive. In a word, I rigorously do not approve of this principle, I denounce it ceaselessly, and in this respect reconciliation is impossible. It will be seen to what extent I insist on this on the way. But it was my *due* to give in to it, and it is up to all of you to tell me why.

Up to you [*toi*] first: I await only one response and it falls to you.

Thus I apostrophize. This too is a genre one can afford oneself, the apostrophe. A genre and a tone. The word—apostrophizes—speaks of the words addressed to the singular one, a live interpellation (the man of discourse or writing interrupts the continuous development of the sequence, abruptly turns toward someone, that is, something, addresses himself to you), but the word also speaks of the address to be detoured.

To filter fire? I have not given up doing so, only justifying or giving a reason for it.

At certain moments, nevertheless, I attempt to explain myself, I call upon a procedure, manipulation, techniques: counterfires, extinctions of voices, fire extinguishers. This was in February 1979 (letters 4, 5, and 6 retain the exposition of several instruments), in March and April 1979 (instructions will be found in the letters of March 9 and 15, somewhat more thought out), finally July 26 and 31 of the same year.

Because I still like him, I can foresee the impatience of the *bad* reader: this is the way I name or accuse the fearful reader, the reader in a hurry to be determined, decided upon deciding (in order to annul, in other words to bring back to oneself, one has to wish to know in advance what to expect, one wishes to expect what has happened, one wishes to expect (oneself)). Now, it is bad, and I know no other definition of the bad, it is bad to predestine one's reading, it is always bad to foretell. It is bad, reader, no longer to like retracing one's steps.

Whatever their original length, the passages that have disappeared are indicated, at the very place of their incineration, by a blank of 52 signs

and a contract insists that this stretch of destroyed surface remain forever indeterminable. In question might be a proper name or a punctuation mark, just the apostrophe that replaces an elided letter, a word, one or several letters, in question might be brief or very long sentences, numerous or scant, that occasionally were themselves originally unterminated. Obviously I am speaking of a

continuum composed each time of words or sentences, of signs missing from the interior, if it can be put thus, of a card, of a letter or of a card-letter. For the totally incinerated *envois* could not be indicated by any mark. I had first thought of preserving the figures and the dates, in other words the places of signature, but I gave it up. What would this book have been like? Before all else I wanted, such was one of the destinations of my labor, to make a book—in part for reasons that remain obscure and that always will, I believe, and in part for other reasons that I must silence. A book instead of what? Or of whom?

As for the 52 signs, the 52 mute spaces, in question is a cipher that I had wanted to be symbolic and secret—in a word a clever cryptogram, that is, a very naive one, that had cost me long calculations. If I state now, and this is the truth, I swear, that I have totally forgotten the rule as well as the elements of such a calculation, as if I had thrown them into the fire, I know in advance all the types of reaction that this will not fail to induce all around. I could even do a long dissertation on the subject (for, against, with, and without psychoanalysis), but this is not the place for it. Let us say that this program is in question throughout this work.

Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address? Without any desire to surprise, and thereby to grab attention by means of obscurity, I owe it to whatever remains of my honesty to say finally that I do not know. Above all I would not have had the slightest interest in this correspondence and this cross-section, I mean in their publication, if some certainty on this matter had satisfied me.

That the signers and the addressees are not always visibly and necessarily identical from one *envoi* to the other, that the signers are not inevitably to be confused with the senders, nor the addressees with the receivers, that is with the readers (*you* for example), etc.—you will have the experience of all of this, and sometimes will feel it quite vividly, although confusedly. This is a disagreeable feeling that I beg every reader, male and female, to forgive me. To tell the truth, it is not only disagreeable, it places you in relation, without discretion, to tragedy. It forbids that you regulate distances, keeping them or losing them. This was somewhat my own situation, and it is my only excuse.

Accustomed as you are to the movement of the posts and to the psychoanalytic movement, to everything that they authorize as concerns falsehoods, fictions, pseudonyms, homonyms, or anonyms, you will not be reassured, nor will anything be the least bit attenu-

ated, softened, familiarized, by the fact that I assume without detour the responsibility for these *envois*, for what remains, or no longer remains, of them, and that in order to make peace within you I am signing them here in my proper name, Jacques Derrida.<sup>1</sup>

7 September 1979

1. I regret that you [*tu*] do not very much trust my signature, on the pretext that we might be several. This is true, but I am not saying so in order to make myself more important by means of some supplementary authority. And even less in order to disquiet, I know what this costs. You are right, doubtless we are several, and I am not as alone as I sometimes say I am when the complaint escapes from me, or when I still put everything into seducing you.




unexpected visitation beyond welcoming apparatuses. If I welcome only what I welcome, what I am ready to welcome, and that I recognize in advance because I expect the coming of the hôte as invited, there is no hospitality.

It is as if there were a competition or a contradiction between two neighboring but incompatible values: *visitation and invitation*, and, more gravely, it is as if there were a hidden contradiction between hospitality and invitation. Or, more precisely, between hospitality as it exposes itself to the visit, to the visitation, and the hospitality that adorns and prepares itself [*se pare et se prépare*] in invitation. These two hôtes that the visitor and the invited are, these two faces of hospitality, visitation and invitation, are not moments of hospitality, dialectical phases of the same process, the same phenomenon. Visitor and invited, visitation and invitation, are simultaneously in competition and incompatible; they figure the non-dialectizable [*non-dialectisable*] tension, even the always imminent implosion, in fact, the continuously occurring implosion in its imminence, unceasing, at once active and deferred, of the concept of hospitality, even of the *concept* in *hospitality*. To wait without waiting, awaiting absolute surprise, the unexpected visitor, awaited without a horizon of expectation: this is indeed about the Messiah as hôte, about the messianic as hospitality, the messianic that introduces deconstructive disruption or madness in the concept of hospitality, the madness of hospitality, even the madness of the concept of hospitality.

I do say "even of the concept in hospitality" because the contradiction (atopical: madness, extravagance, in Greek: *atopos*) of which we are speaking produces or registers this autodeconstruction in every concept, in the concept of concept: not only because hospitality undoes, should undo, the grip, the seizure (the *Begriff*, the *Begreifen*, the capture of the *concipere*, *cum-capio*, of the *comprehendere*, the force or the violence of the taking [*prendre*] as comprehending [*comprendre*]), hospitality is, *must* be, *owes to itself* to be, inconceivable and incomprehensible, but also because in it—we have undergone this test and ordeal so often—each concept opens itself to its opposite, reproducing or producing in advance, in the rapport of one concept to the other, the contradictory and deconstructive law of hospitality. Each concept becomes hospitable to its other, to an other than itself that is no longer *its* other. With this apparent nuance we have a formula of the entire contra-

9. *Translator's Note*: "L'étranger" can often, and more appropriately, be translated as "the foreigner" and even (although not in this particular instance) as "the foreign." It can also be read as "abroad" as in "voyager à l'étranger," to travel abroad. The expression "à l'étranger" could thus be read "to the stranger," "to the foreign," or simply "abroad." Because of those and other echoes (of Levinas as well), I have chosen to consistently translate "l'étranger" as "stranger" but minimally the more contained or current meaning of "foreigner" should always be kept in mind.

diction, which is more than a dialectical contradiction, and which constitutes perhaps the very stakes of all consistent deconstructions: the difference between something like "its" other (the very Hegelian formula of "its other"), the difference, therefore, between hospitality extended to one's other (to everybody their own, their chosen and selected hôtes, their integratable immigrants, their assimilable visitors with whom cohabitation would be livable) and hospitality extended to an other who no longer is, who never was the "its other" of dialectics.

If  hospitality—if there is any—must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte, my other, not even my neighbor or my brother (Levinas always says that the other, the other man, man as the other is *my* neighbor, my universal brother, in humanity. At bottom, this is one of our larger questions: is hospitality reserved, confined, to man, to the universal brother? For even if Levinas disjoints the idea of fraternity from the idea of the "fellow [*semblable*],"<sup>10</sup> and the idea of neighbor [*prochain*] or of proximity from the idea of non-distance, of non-distancing, of fusion and identity, he nonetheless maintains that the hospitality of the hôte as well as that of the hostage must belong to the site of the fraternity of the neighbor). Hospitality, therefore—if there is any—must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my hôte, my other, not even my neighbor or my brother, perhaps an "animal"—I do say animal, for we would have to return to what one calls the animal, first of all with regards to Noah who, on God's order and until the day of peace's return, extended hospitality to animals sheltered and saved on the ark, and also with regards to Jonah's whale, and to *Julien l'hospitalier* in Gustave Flaubert's narrative (*The Legend of St Julian Hospitator* [*La légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*]). Saint Julian was a great hunter before the Lord. A large stag was struck by his last arrow, a large black stag in the forehead of whom the arrow remains stuck though it "did not seem to feel it," a large stag, whose "blazing eyes, solemn as a patriarch or a judge." This stag announces three times to him that he, Julian, will kill his father and mother: "Accursed, accursed, accursed! One day, cruel heart, you will kill your father and mother."<sup>11</sup> And Julian (this is the whole story that you know or should read) does in fact kill them and later finds himself devoted to a duty of hospitality, to the point of receiving the visit, the visitation of a leper

10. *Translator's Note*: On the French "*semblable*," see what Emmanuel Levinas writes: "Le tiers est autre que le prochain, mais aussi un autre prochain, mais aussi un prochain de l'Autre et non pas seulement son semblable [The third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow]" (Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974], 200; *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998], 157).

11. Gustave Flaubert, "The Legend of St Julian Hospitator" in *Three Tales*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 67.



Christ who tells him "I am hungry," "I am thirsty," "I am cold," "take me in your bed and in your arms, embrace me."

If every concept shelters or lets itself be haunted by another concept, by an other than itself that is no longer even its other, then no concept remains in place any longer. This is about the concept of concept, and this is why I suggested earlier that hospitality, the experience, the apprehension, the exercise of impossible hospitality, of hospitality as the possibility of impossibility (to receive another guest whom I am incapable of welcoming, to become capable of that which I am incapable of)—this is the exemplary experience of deconstruction itself, when it is or does what it has to do or to be, that is, the experience of the impossible. Hospitality—this is a name or an example of deconstruction. Of the deconstruction of the concept, of the concept of concept, as well as of its construction, its home, its "at-home" [*son chez-soi*]. Hospitality is the deconstruction of the at-home; deconstruction is hospitality to the other, to the other than oneself, the other than "its other," to an other who is beyond any "its other." We have undergone such a test or ordeal a thousand times when, for example (to remain close to Levinas for a little longer), we saw that the border between the ethical and the political is no longer insured, that the third [*le tiers*], who is the birth of justice and finally of the state, already announces himself in the duel of the face-to-face and the face, and therefore disjoins it, dis-orients it, "destin-errs" it; that the *beyond* the state (the condition of ethics) had to produce itself in the state—and that all the topological invaginations, which made the outside produce an enclave in the inside of the inside, were affecting the order of discourse, were producing deconstructive ruptures in the discourse and the construction of concepts.<sup>12</sup>

There is no apparent inconsistency, no absolute discontinuity between *Totality and Infinity*—which insisted upon the welcome [*l'accueil*] (the governing word) and upon the subjectivity of the subject as *hôte*—and then, ten years later, the definition of the subject as hostage, vulnerable subject subjected to substitution, to trauma, persecution, and obsession. Yet, there is a change of accent and a change of scenery [*paysage*]. After peace, after the peaceable and peaceful experience of welcoming, there follows (but this following [*succession*] is not a new stage, only the becoming-explicit of the same logic) a more violent experience, the drama of a relation to the other that ruptures, bursts in or breaks in, or still, you may recall some of those citations, an experience of the Good that elects me before I welcome it, in other words, of a Goodness, a good violence of the Other that precedes welcoming.

In fact, beginning with the texts that follow *Totality and Infinity*, for example in "The Trace," we had already lent our attention to the Levinasian definition of the

12. Translator's Note: See Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*.

face as *visit* and *visitation*: the face "visits me as already absolute" or "the face is of itself visitation and transcendence."<sup>13</sup> The concepts (disrupting of concepts) constituted by the motifs of hostage and substitution belong to [*relèvent de*] the same thought of visitation, that is to say, to the coming of an other as a *hôte* who is not invited [*comme hôte qui n'est pas invité*], a visitor who is not an expected guest, an invited guest [*un invité invité*], a guest the welcoming of whom I am ready for. This is indeed a thought of hospitality, and of hospitality to the infinite, to God, perhaps even more consistent, but it is a thought of hospitality where the one welcoming [*l'accueillant*] is second, where the welcoming [*l'accueil*] is second, no longer subject to the visit, to the visitation, and where one becomes, prior to being the *hôte*, the hostage of the other. There is no disagreement here with the logic of *Totality and Infinity*, but the displacement of accent intervenes in the self-contradiction, the self-deconstruction of the concept of hospitality. And with this concept of subjectivity or of ipseity as hostage, we have the inseparable concept of *substitution*, of the unique as *hostage* responsible for all, and therefore substitutable, precisely there where [*là même où*] he is absolutely irreplaceable.

Why does it appear to me necessary, today, to return to these motifs of hostage and of substitution?

To say it first in one word, before I explain myself better, I return to these two motifs of hostage and of substitution, from the point of view, obviously, of hospitality, in order to initiate, at the turn of this year, a turn in our trajectory, at any case in the references that guide us. We have spoken a lot about the Bible, what one calls the Old and the New Testaments, what Levinas himself, precisely in "The Trace" (in the passage I quoted earlier), had called "our Judeo-Christian spirituality." But we have not yet come to the culture of this other Abrahamic monotheism that is Islam, about which even the most ignorant know that it too has always presented itself—perhaps even more than Judaism and Christianity—as a religion, an ethics, and a culture, of hospitality.

The mediation that seems to me here, and which is (perhaps, perhaps) the most appropriate in our context, is found, I will explain, in the figure of a spirituality that is, this time, Christiano-Islamic: the oeuvre, the thought, the extraordinary life of Louis Massignon.

Massignon was, if one can trust these words, an Islamologist and an Orientalist. He also oriented his entire life, his entire spiritual adventure, his entire testimony

13. In *Humanisme de l'autre l'homme*, 1963–64, but gathered in this collection in 1972; see Emmanuel Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," trans. Alphonso Lingis, *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 106; "La signification et le sens," *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Paris: Fata Morgana-Le livre de poche, 1972), 69.